

ORAL TESTIMONY of
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Federal Communications Commission

Subcommittee on Telecommunications Trade, and Consumer Protection
Committee on Commerce
United States House of Representatives

Hearing

on

Wireless E911

June 14, 2001

I. Introduction

Good morning Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee.

Thank you for this opportunity to report to you on the Commission's policies and rules aimed at improving the quality and delivery of wireless 911 services throughout the Nation and, in particular, at implementing wireless Enhanced 911.

II. Importance of Wireless Enhanced 911 Service

A little over two years ago, in my second week on the job as Chief of the FCC's Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, I appeared before this Subcommittee on 911 related matters.

Since that time, both Congress and the Commission have continued to focus on wireless 911 issues and, in my view, taken important steps towards the goal of a nationwide, ubiquitous, reliable wireless E911 system. One of the cornerstones of this progress was the passage of the Wireless Communications and Public Safety Act in October 1999, under the auspices of this Subcommittee and the leadership of then-Subcommittee Chairman Tauzin and many of the current members. That Act mandated 911 as the nationwide number for emergency calling and cleared the way for full implementation of wireless E911 by, for example, addressing carrier liability protection and privacy issues, and directing the Commission to work with all of the stakeholders in their efforts to make wireless 911 a reality.

On the FCC side, we too have been actively engaged on E911 matters during the past two years. Among other things, we have:

- Increased the range of options available to carriers by permitting the use of new handset-based technologies, such as network-assisted GPS; and a

“so-called” hybrid technology – one that combines elements of both handset- and network-based approaches.
- Adjusted and clarified our rules concerning certain operational issues affecting E911 implementation, for example, by eliminating a requirement that public safety agencies must pay wireless carriers for their costs of complying with the E911 mandate, and instead requiring that each party – carrier and PSAP – to pay their own costs for implementation.
- Convened several multi-party meetings – including wireless carriers, technology vendors, equipment manufacturers, and members of the public safety community – to review the state of wireless location technology development.
- Performed extensive outreach, speaking at dozens of conferences and other events aimed at informing and educating interested

parties, including state and local public safety agencies and carriers on our E911 rules and policies

Now, in 2001, the beginning of phased-in deployment for E911 Phase II is almost here. Under the Commission's rules, carriers are to begin the process of rolling out E911 Phase II on October 1, 2001. This October 1, 2001 deployment timeframe dates back to a Consensus Agreement in 1996 between the wireless carrier community and the public safety community that formed the basis for our E911 rules. In other words, the five-year implementation period and the October 1, 2001 start date were what the carriers proposed to us as an appropriate timetable for development and deployment of enhanced 911.

When Phase II is implemented, it will generally enable the reporting of the location of 911 calls within 100 meters or better. However, I should add that this is not a flash-cut process – under the Commission's rules, it will take several years for Phase II to be ubiquitously deployed. For example, with handset-based technologies, the rules require carriers to hit progressively higher penetration levels for location capable handsets, until they achieve 95 percent penetration by the end of 2005. Similarly, carriers

choosing network-based technologies must incorporate the necessary hardware and software into their networks over a 6- to 18-month period after receiving a request from a PSAP for E911 service. These requests are expected to come in over the next few years as PSAPs become ready to utilize Phase II services at different points in time. For example, at the present time, it appears that about 1- 2% of the PSAPs nationwide have requested Phase II E911.

As we approach this benchmark, the need for wireless E911 is greater than ever. Today, there are more than 116 million wireless subscribers, and most PSAPs now receive about 30-50 percent of their 911 calls from wireless phones. This places increasing burdens on call takers at 911 call centers, particularly since accurate location information is not now provided for any of those calls. E911 Phase II is needed more than ever to help police, fire and emergency medical teams locate emergencies more quickly and do their life-saving work more effectively and efficiently.

III. Current Status of Wireless E911

Where does wireless E911 stand now – and how near are the parties to the Original Consensus Agreement to beginning to accurately locate wireless 911 calls? Well it seems clear these parties have come a long way. And, from the information provided to us, it appears that a number of carriers are well on the way to deploying Phase II, and a number of call centers have requested Phase II and are preparing themselves to use this new location information effectively. But there are always challenges involved in deploying any major new technology on a mass market basis for the first time, and wireless location technologies are no different. To make the promise of wireless E911 a reality, much work remains to be done by call centers, vendors, and carriers to meet the challenges involved in deploying these lifesaving technologies.

We at the Commission will continue our work to make this happen. We are committed to working with the stakeholders to resolve problems and speed deployment. But we are also committed to enforcement of our rules if, for example, parties simply ignore their obligations or fail to make good faith efforts to comply.

At the same time, we will continue to be flexible and practical in applying the E911 rules, when the circumstances warrant that approach. Last year, the Commission set out specific standards for Phase II waivers. Those standards, fundamentally, require carriers to show the Commission what they can and will do to provide Phase II location information, not simply what they cannot do. We are currently considering several waiver requests and have heard reports that other carriers are preparing additional requests. We plan to address these requests based on the specific showings and facts presented to us, with our focus on the most practical and realistic means of achieving the objectives of promoting public safety and implementing Phase II as soon and as fully as possible.

I am reassured by factual information indicating that there is wireless location technology available capable of locating 911 callers much more accurately than is in place today. It is time to begin deployment. As deployment proceeds, I expect that the technology and system-wide performance will improve. I also expect that as customers increasingly understand how location capability makes their lives safer, they will insist

on having it available. They will come to rely on automatic wireless location in the same way they rely on air bags and seatbelts in their cars. I am confident that the future of this technology is strong, once it is actually deployed and this "virtuous cycle" begins to kick in. But to get to that future, all of us involved in this process will have to redouble our efforts to see that the promise of this life-saving technology is fulfilled.

IV. Conclusion

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to provide information on the Commission's wireless E911 program. I look forward to updating this information as wireless E911 advances and to answering any of your questions.